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The House the Children Built

by

Eleanor Glendower Griffith

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The House the Children Built

A Health Play for Children

By

ELEANOR GLENDOWER GRIFFITH



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FOUR IMPORTANT POINTS:

1 We emphasize health as a positive ideal, presenting health to children in terms of beauty, strength and joy. Too much so-called health education is merely a matter of information about disease.

2 Our efforts are concentrated on the *formation* of health habits rather than the acquisition of facts in physiology and hygiene. The essential laws of health have been incorporated into the "Rules of the Game." It is fundamentally important for a child to acquire a taste for and form the habit of eating the right kind of food, the habit of a thorough daily bowel movement, of an early bed hour. Unless the health teaching actually functions in these practical ways in the child's life, that teaching is in vain.

3 We believe that to interest the child in the significance of his weight, is one of the best ways of creating in him a health conscience and a willingness to obey the laws of health. It is as important for the growing child, as for the baby, to be weighed regularly. For this reason there should be scales in every school and the children should be weighed each month. We have devised the Class Room Weight Record as a means of simplifying and making attractive this routine. This should be used as the corner-stone in your health education program. Games and devices serve to continue the group interest so created.

4 In order to teach health effectively we must capture the interest and imagination of the child and help him to express his new enthusiasm originally and creatively. Our posters, health stories and plays are therefore offered merely as suggestive material.

CHARACTERS

Fairy Health
Cho Cho
First Child
Second Child
Third Child
Group of Children
First School Child
Second School Child
Witch
First Boy
Second Boy

The House the Children Built

STAGE SETTING

The Fairy Garden—Green Bush at left of stage—Fairy lying beside Bush.

Fairy: My house, my beautiful house is gone. What shall I do?

Voice (from bush, calling): Fairy, little Fairy!

(Fairy rises to her knees, looks everywhere for voice.)

Fairy: Whose voice is that?

Voice: I am called Education, and by some the Lovely Bird. What is your trouble? Why do you weep?

Fairy: I had a beautiful house, lovely beyond words. A wicked Witch hath burned it to the earth. Its windows were of stained glass and the sunlight stealing in filled my house with wondrous color. Its bricks were firm and strong and dark green, glossy ivy hung from the shingled roof. In one short hour it burned. Look there beyond that lattice and see the blackened ruins of my house.

(Points to left of stage. Rises to feet.)

Voice: Keep up your courage, little Fairy, and I will tell you how to build anew your house.

(Fairy dries her eyes.)

Fairy: How can that possibly be done?

Voice: It can be done by the hands of little children alone. Every time a child learns to eat the right food, a brick shall be added to your house; every time a child learns to sleep in the sweet, fresh air, a shingle shall be put upon the roof, and every time a child learns to play and be happy, a colored glass shall be added to the windows.

Fairy: But, alas! How shall we teach the children these things?

Voice: I will go to the teachers, who are wise and good, and tell them what to do. Farewell, little Health Fairy.

(Noise in bush.)

Fairy: He has gone. Can it be true that little children will give me back my house?

(Fairy flits among the flowers, trains a vine, pulls a rose, humming softly. Exit left.)

(Enter right, Boy, school age, dressed in old clothes, brimless hat, bare feet, stumbles, falls flat on stage, rises to sitting posture, rubs toe.)

Boy: Lordy! But that toe hurts me (examines foot carefully) and I have skinned it, too. It's mighty good I didn't have on my Sunday shoes or they would be skinned 'stead of my foot. I can grow more skin, but shoe leather costs a lot of spensive money these days. (Rises, limps across stage.) Guess I'll rest myself on this here bench. (Takes out mouth organ, plays jig.)

(Enter Second Boy, left stage; pauses. Second Boy also ragged.)

Second Boy: Some playing! Sounds like a yellow dog having a fit.

(First Boy sits up angrily.)

First Boy: Bet you can't beat it.

Second Boy: I could beat that in my sleep.

(First Boy walks over, offers mouth organ.)

First Boy: Well, then, lemme hear you play "The Star-Spangled Banner," that's a pretty piece.

Second Boy: I ain't playing to-day, I got a fever blister. (Refuses mouth organ.)

First Boy (scornfully): You ain't got gumption enough to play nothing. I seen people like you before, they know so much that their heads won't hold it all.

(Second Boy shakes his fist, pushing First Boy.)

First Boy: Who you pushing? For two pins I'd knock you into next week, but you ain't my size.

Second Boy: Quit it. (Takes marbles from pocket,—large agate.)

(First Boy draws near eagerly.)

First Boy: Lordy, but they are beauts.

(Boys draw ring, start game.)

Second Boy: What you doing out of school to-day? I hooked it.

First Boy: I didn't hook it. My ma sent me to borrow an extra cup from her sister, 'cause the preacher is coming to supper. I got lost and come to this place. Who lives here, anyhow?

(Enter Fairy Health. Boys start back, staring.)
(Fairy advances, smiling.)

Fairy: How do you like my garden, boys?

First Boy: Scuse me, miss, but who are you? I never did see anybody look like you.

(Walks around Fairy, admiring dress, touches wings.)

Fairy: I am the Health Fairy and this is Fairyland, but you boys ought to be in school. Why are you here?

Second Boy: I hooked it, lady. My teacher's awful nice, but I got so tired hearing about how many bones was mixed up inside of me when we had our physiology lesson this morning that I didn't go back after dinner.

Fairy: I can understand your not caring about the bones, but it's not playing fair to hook it. You see, the state pays for every day at school, and when you stay away the state pays twice and the old Witch Ignorance gains a day.

Second Boy: Who gains a day?

Fairy: There is a wicked witch called Ignorance who goes about the world doing harm to every child who listens to her. She whispered in your ear to-day, although you saw her not, "Don't go to school!" In her home is an immense gray rock, with sides as smooth as the blackboard in your school. On this she keeps her score. Under the names of children whom she claims as hers she had to-day written yours.

(Second Boy comes forward angrily.)

Second Boy: I like her nerve, writing my name on her blackboard; but you bet, Fairy, she won't get another chance. Bones or no bones, I stay in school to-morrow.

(Fairy lays hand on his shoulder.)

Fairy: That's the right spirit. (Turns to First Boy.) And why are you out of school, my boy; did you hook it, too?

First Boy: No, miss, my ma sent me to borrow another cup, 'cause we ain't got but three cups, and the new preacher is coming to supper.

Fairy: And did you get the cup?

First Boy: Yes, miss, here it is. (Puts hand in coat pocket, draws out cup, broken in two pieces. Amazed. Frightened.) I broke it when I fell down. (Looks at broken cup.) My ma will beat me for this. I'm afraid to go home.

Fairy: Put the broken cup behind that green bush. (Points to left stage. Boy obeys.) Come stand beside me here. (Fairy raises her hand and waves it three times toward the bush.)

Fairy: China cup, broken in two—Be mended now, just like new. (To First Boy): Go get your cup. (Boy walks to bush, emerges with unbroken cup in hand, to center of stage.)

Fairy (smiling): Take your cup home, child, and try to have your mother send you on errands out of school hours or Witch Ignorance will write your name on her gray stone blackboard.

First Boy: I sure will, miss, and I'm going home on a straight bee-line before I break this cup again.

(Exit First Boy.)

(Second Boy follows him to gate, pauses.)

Second Boy: Good-bye, Fairy, I'll get even with that witch yet. (Exit left.)

(Enter Cho Cho through gate, at right, quite excited.)

Cho Cho: The highroad is filled with children all hurrying here. What it does it mean, Fairy?

Fairy: They are coming to build my house.

Cho Cho: To build your house? Congratulations, dear Fairy, but words fail me. Nothing but a little monkey business can express my pleasure.

(Dances, turns handsprings and cuts up generally. Fairy looks on, smiling.)

(Enter through gateway, children carrying schoolbooks, hats or sunbonnets, lunch baskets —singing song or lullaby. Pause before Fairy.)

First Child: I am drinking a quart of milk each day. May I help to rebuild your house, good Fairy Health?

Fairy: You may, indeed. Pass beyond the lattice yonder.

(Child curtsies. Exit left stage.)

Second Child: I eat green vegetables. May I help, too?

(Fairy smiles assent, points to left of stage. Exit Second Child, waving hand to Fairy.)

Third Child (advancing): I eat a lovely bowl of oatmeal for my breakfast every morning. Dear Fairy, let me add a brick unto your house.

Fairy: With pleasure, little one; go forward to the lattice.

(Points to lattice at left. Exit Third Child, skipping. Group of children follow Third Child, singing and waving hands and books to Fairy and Cho Cho.)

Fairy: Let us follow the children, Cho Cho.

Cho Cho: Lead the way, sweet Fairy.

(Offers hand to Fairy. Exit, left, talking earnestly.)

(Enter a Witch, from gateway at right. Steals across stage, looks behind lattice.)

Witch: Alack-a-day, that Fairy Health hath stolen the children from me. Once they ate buns and drank black coffee. Now they eat oatmeal, drink milk, and even cocoa. Soon all the children in our land will be round and rosy. I must stop this Fairy house before it has too firm a foundation. (Walks back and forth across stage, wrings hands, pauses in thought.) I have it. As the children pass this way, I will speak to them. (Draws box of candy from her cloak.) This candy will persuade them to follow me. Once in my far distant home, the Fairy will be powerless to help them.

(Enter Second Child, through gateway at right.)

Witch: Good morning, pretty dear, where are you going?

Child: I am going to build the Fairy's house. Is this the right way?

(Witch draws near, smiling.)

Witch: Don't do that, my child. (Lays hand on child's shoulder.) Come with me, I will give you coffee to drink and sweet buns. My house is more beautiful than the Fairy's, and see this delicious candy. Come with me.

(Child hesitates. Takes Witch's hand. Exit, right, Witch and Child.)

(Re-enter Witch.)

Witch: I have gained one child. She is now in charge of my Coal Black Imp, and will soon be far from this Fairy's help.

(Enter another child, hands full of flowers.)

Child: Can you tell me how to find the Fairy Health? I picked these flowers for her on my way to school.

Witch: What do you want with her, my dear?

Child: I am helping to build her house. You know a wicked witch burned it to the ground.

(Witch draws near, smiling.)

Witch: Come with me to my house. It's much more beautiful than the Fairy's, and you need never eat horrid food, like oatmeal or green vegetables. See this candy? It's quite delicious; do have some. (Holds box to Child. Child draws back.)

Child: No, no; the Fairy does not want us to eat candy between meals.

Witch: Why mind that Fairy? She does not love you; come with me. (Child frightened, draws back. Witch roughly grabs her arm.) You shall come with me, ugly brat. (Child struggles, screams.)

(Enter Boys, right.)

Both Boys: The Witch! (Surprised. Rush to Witch, grab her arms. Witch drops child, struggles. Boys hold her.)

Second Boy: So you put my name on your blackboard! I said I'd pay you for it. (Shakes Witch.)

(Enter Cho Cho and Fairy, left. Fairy moves swiftly toward Witch. Waves her hand above Witch's head, gazing steadily into Witch's eyes. Witch frightened, stunned. Staggers through gate. Exit right. Fairy raises child. Comforts her. Dries eyes.)

Fairy: Follow that Witch, Cho Cho, and see if there is any other child in her wicked power. (Exit Cho Cho, right.) Come see my house, dear child, you shall add a brick to its walls. (Takes child's hand. Exit Fairy and child, left.)

First Boy: Come on, let's go see this Fairy house.

(Exit Boys, left.)

(Enter Cho Cho at right with lost Child. Child's clothes torn, hair disarranged, crying.)

Cho Cho: Do not cry, little one, you are safe in the Fairy's garden. The old Witch Ignorance cannot harm you here.

(Enter Fairy, left, through lattice. Sees Child.)

Fairy: My dear, my dear, what happened to you? (Puts arms around Child.)

Cho Cho: The Witch had persuaded her to leave your garden, Fairy, and the Coal Black Imp had dragged the Child through tangled underbrush.

Fairy: I hope you punished them.

Cho Cho: That I did. The Imp's long tail I tied to the Witch's back hair, and left them struggling to be free. (Laughs.) They were indeed a funny sight.

Fairy: I cannot pity them, the Witch is so cruel to my children, but let's forget her, and dance among my flowers to show our happiness.

(Cho Cho bows before Fairy, takes her hand. Enter other children and boys from left. Fairy and Cho Cho lead march of dance.)

(Boys dance together, cut capers.)

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